

# MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

Published quarterly by the Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference at Scottdale, Pennsylvania, and distributed to the members of Mennonite Historical Association. **Editors:** Melvin Gingerich and Grant M. Stoltz. **Associate Editors:** H. S. Bender, H. A. Brunk, J. C. Clemens, S. F. Coffman, J. C. Freitz, Ira D. Landis, C. Z. Mast, Menno M. Troyer, J. C. Wenger, and S. S. Wenger. Dues for regular membership (\$1.50 per year) or for sustaining membership (\$5.00 or more annually) may be sent to the treasurer of the Association, Ira D. Landis, R. 1, Bareville, Pennsylvania. Articles and news items may be addressed to Melvin Gingerich, Goshen, Indiana.

Vol. XIV

April, 1953

No. 2



**Employees of the Mennonite Publishing Co., Elkhart, Ind., 1886**

Left to right: John F. Funk, Jacob Oberholzer, Abram K. Funk, James Garlinger, Abram B. Kolb, Samuel Fred Coffman, Nelson Blough, Louis Rutter, Joseph Summers. (From an old photograph in the John F. Funk Collection, Mennonite Church Archives, Goshen, Ind.)

## The Later Years of John F. Funk

WILLARD D. RUTH

In 1867 John F. Funk moved to Elkhart, Indiana, as Chicago at this time had no Mennonite Church and he thought it better to have his publication of Mennonite church papers closer to Mennonite communities. At Elkhart he rented a basement and carried on his work, but he saw that his basement was not suitable. A vacant lot was bought on a hillside. With his own hands this already busy man cleared this lot of brush and timber and had a four-story brick building built on this site. In a year this building was ready to be occupied and on New Year's Day of 1868 moving began. The move from his basement establishment to the new four-story modern printing establishment was quite an event. As a new printing press was bought and put in use the old hand lever type was discontinued.

At this time his publication was growing and reaching out into the entire church. Although at first people looked with suspicion on this new church literature, the brotherhood now started to look for the next edition to make its appearance.

Funk had left his brother Abram in Chicago engaged in the lumber business. At this time he influenced him to come to Elkhart and help in the publication of this church paper, which he did. They disposed of their entire holdings in the lumber business and devoted their entire time to the publication business. This business was established under the name of John F. Funk and Bro., and from 1868 to 1875 this business was conducted as such. As the business grew and became church-wide they decided to charter it. So in the year 1875 they obtained a fifty-

year charter under the name of Mennonite Publishing Co., which was continued for fifty years.

John F. Funk wrote many editorials in his church paper which showed his ability as a writer and student of Biblical doctrines and church needs and requirements. His outstanding book at this time was *The Mennonite Church and Her Accusers*. Those people who tried to set forth the faults of the Mennonite Church he tried to correct in this book.

The singing in the Mennonite Church at this time was practically all in German. Funk felt a need for a collection of English hymns; so a new songbook made its appearance in the Mennonite Church called *The Hymns and Tunes*. A number of brethren made a selection of these hymns but John F. Funk was the guiding hand back of it.

Another one of his books which was widely read in Bucks and Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania was the *Biographical Sketch of Pre. John Geil*, who was born in the year 1778 and died in

1866. He was a very forceful and fluent speaker. Geil and Funk were closely related. Preacher Geil's ancestors came from Virginia and were related to George Washington. Undoubtedly John F. Funk had listened to many of Geil's sermons.

The poem at the end of this book composed by Funk which shows his esteem of this man is as follows:

*I see him now the man of God  
Commanding and serene;  
So long a faithful servant been.*

*Within the plain old church of stone  
That stood upon the hill  
With windows low, and walls so strong  
He meekly sought his place to fill.*

*For five and fifty years he stood  
And lifted up his voice,  
And told the people how that God  
Had made the sons of men rejoice.  
The faithful shepherd rests in peace  
His flock still worships there  
And oft methinks beside his tomb  
One offers up a silent prayer.*

*And pleads with him who kindly hears  
The humblest sinner's cry  
That he may still assuage their fears  
And send them blessings from on high*

*That he may lead and keep his church  
In all the paths of love  
May keep them as a shining light  
And bring them to his rest above.*

*Oh! let us often think of him  
Whose words were life and peace  
And forward press to that abode  
Where life and joy shall never cease.*

John F. Funk's great-great-grandfather had helped translate and publish the *Martyrs' Mirror* from Dutch to German. Funk saw a need that the church should have it in English. In the year 1836 the linguist J. F. Sohm translated it into the English language, which after three years of work was published by John F. Funk and Bro. at a cost of \$6,000. Whenever we see a bishop or minister use a confession of faith, do we think of who took the time and pains to compile it? If we look in the front of this book we will find John F. Funk's name. This book alone shows his wise forethought.

The *Family Almanac* was well received throughout the Mennonite Church, which John F. Funk also published, and was almost a necessity in many families. The Sunday-school helps which are now known as the quarterlies were a product of his mind. On his visits East he would distribute these helps, which offended many. Isaac Meyers of Deep Run Church would not let him preach there for this reason.

John F. Funk was ordained to the ministry in May, 1865, by John M. Brene-man, Gardner, Grundy County, Illinois. His first sermon was based on I Cor. 3:11. Fifty years later he used the same text

again. He used both the English and the German language. S. F. Coffman said, "My early impressions of the ministry were not so pleasant as I remember the sing-song grunting methods of the old ministers, but John F. Funk's preaching was different. He was a man of ability, unemotional, earnest, logical, and clear in his teaching of the Word of God and his manner and methods were interesting."

He established the church and Sunday school at Elkhart, Indiana, in 1871, going out into what he thought was the country, buying land, and thereon building the church which is now known as the Prairie Street Mennonite Church. This church was enlarged several times and it was seriously damaged by fire on February 15, 1931. When the cornerstone of the new church was laid, this was put on it,

"Founded by John F. Funk 1871."

Occasionally he would come east and preach and visit his relatives. In the morning he would hold services in the churches and in the evening he would preach in the schoolhouses which were packed to the doors. Such schoolhouses as Green Hill, North Branch, and Chestnut Ridge were in his home community and at these meetings he would hand out literature and advocate some of his progressive methods which were not well received in his old home district.

On June 6, 1892, he was ordained a bishop, to have the oversight of six churches surrounding Elkhart. At Elkhart was concentrated the best talent of the Mennonite Church, making it the outstanding church of the day. Many of the brightest and most talented young men and women of other localities were employed here. The influence of the Publishing House and Elkhart Church was felt throughout the entire church.

One of these men was John S. Coffman, the pioneer Mennonite evangelist, and his influence, work, and inspiration were felt by such men as M. S. Steiner, D. H. Bender, J. A. Ressler, and A. D. Wenger. The picture has been bright so far of John F. Funk but there is also a dark side of his life. He had his share of troubles which must be set forth to make the picture complete.

In his bishop district there was a difference and this difference was brought before the Indiana-Michigan Conference. Five bishops from other districts were also called in to consider the difference on January 31, 1902.

Their decision was that Funk should be inactive as a bishop but that his ministry should not be affected by their decision. He remained inactive as a bishop for the rest of his life. Influential and powerful in his thinking, men would turn to him easily and he could have headed a faction and split the church. The fact that he did not do so shows a good quality in the man. Years after some of the men who helped to hand in the decision

against him admitted that Funk was right. Funk's constant aim was to consolidate the church and not be an instigator of factions.

Troubles never come singlehanded and on November 18, 1903, the Indiana National Bank failed. This meant a personal loss to the Funks of \$40,000 which in those days was a fortune. Still another calamity was to befall them. March 26, 1906, fire broke out in the Publishing House and partially destroyed it. Regardless of this they never missed one issue of the church paper. These combinations of events resulted in a decision to dispose of the business to the young Publishing House in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. The printing equipment and building were later sold to James A. Bellico. The *Elkhart Truth* had this to say of John F. Funk on his eighty-ninth birthday, "Still active in business and occupying the same stand for the longest period of time as dean of Elkhart businessmen, each day finds him at his desk early and late." At ninety-three he was still occupying the same desk.

In 1925 some of his relatives from Pennsylvania visited him. He was at this time ninety years old but still alert. He was a very good conversationalist and had good eyesight and good hearing. After the evening meal he took them to his office, where in his library, which was the best, he had one of the original *Martyrs' Mirrors* of 1754. This edition is very rare and a copy can be found among his books. A rare collection of books showed his foresight. Before his guests realized it, the time was past midnight and this old man was poring over his prized possession, talking and entertaining them in such a way that it left a good impression upon them.

So let me sum up his achievements. In the year 1871 he helped locate twelve hundred Russian families who had come to the United States. Some of these families would come to the Funk home on their way west and he would put them up for days at a time. Someone said that he was a man of great patience. Only on one occasion did they see him out of sorts. Twenty Russian families came to Elkhart on their way west and Funk tried to find lodging for them in various homes but some were very reluctant to take these strangers in, which Funk did with no thought at all. He lost his patience with his brethren on this occasion. He would go with them and locate them in the best farming land in the west, which he picked out with good judgment, as these Russian families afterwards testified. These families never forgot John F. Funk's loyalty and devotion to their needs in time of trouble. This took time which this busy man gave, and he helped raise \$100,000 to get them started.

He helped to establish the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. The first series of meetings ever held in the

Mennonite Church he held at Masontown, Pennsylvania, and he had fifty converts.

He held the first evening meetings ever held in the Mennonite Church in Virginia and people came from miles around to attend.

In September, 1890, he was requested to come to Missouri to hold meetings. He wanted J. S. Coffman to go but as Coffman could not afford it at the time, John F. Funk financed him. One of the results of this meeting was that a young lawyer was converted named Daniel Kauffman. Kauffman.

Services were held at Elkhart, Indiana, for the first missionaries who were sent to India. John F. Funk presided at the meeting and the church was crowded to the doors. This was November 4, 1898.

His library and rare old books were acquired by Goshen College and the Mennonite Publishing House after his death. In 1867 he also helped to start a Sunday school in Ohio.

He saw the need for a church school. In 1895 Elkhart Institute was started and later developed into what is now known as Goshen College. In 1890 he started the Sunday-school helps, which are now known as the quarterlies.

As a minister and leader he was respected and loved by all as few men have been. In conference he was a forceful figure and his opinions were usually accepted. He was no extremist and he lived in a critical time, which was the change-over from German to English.

He proved cool, had good judgment, and many a harmful decision was prevented by his foresight. He died on January 8, 1930, at the age of ninety-five.

Chalfont, Pa.

A letter to J. F. Funk.

Amish P. O., Johnson Co., Iowa  
April 23rd, 1874

Dear Brother Funk,

I hope you will not be offended at the zeal which I manifest in behalf of our brethren in faith across the ocean: I feel that I have offered as a *free gift* and *loan* all that I am able to bear with my limited means, which is included in the general Church contribution of Deer Creek, and which I suppose is in your hands ere this reaches you, but still I feel that more is needed. Sometimes I wish: Were I but a millionaire, so that I might be the instrument of doing much good and causing many hearts to rejoice—but nevertheless, Christ says the poor widow who cast two mites into the treasury of God cast in more than all the rest. So I hope that God's blessings may also rest upon a small sum that is given from a sincere heart. But forbear my indulgence. I did not mean to write an exhortation.

I simply wish to say, if you were able to give satisfactory information, so that

I might depend upon getting a hand to work on the farm to work out the money, I will yet borrow \$100.00 and forward it to you for the Russian aid upon those conditions. I have been speaking to several about this matter. All think the plan very good. So I will now act upon my own responsibility. Perhaps if I succeed, others may be induced to do the same. You stated in your last issue of the *Herald* that those who could take orphans should inform the "Board" of the fact. I have consulted with my wife upon that important responsibility, and we agreed

that we would be willing to take two—a girl and a boy, but not under ten years of age, as we have a family of small children. We also could provide a family with a house, at least for a while, until a better place could be provided. Hoping that my efforts may not all be vain, I remain Yours Respectfully,

Amish, Iowa J. D. Guengerich

From the John F. Funk Collection,  
Archives of the Mennonite Church.  
Slightly edited.

## An Address by John F. Funk

Beloved friends:

Two weeks ago the 28th day of May was to me a special day, and on that account I was really sorry that we could not meet as first arranged. From another standpoint I was glad that the Lord in His wise providence had arranged the matter. I am feeling that the Lord's way is always the best, and we have the blessed assurance that what God doeth is always well done.

I was going in that day to tell you whatever the 28th day of May is to you, it is a very special day to me.

In 1862, in the month of October, at the time of the Indiana State Conference, I made my first visit to Elkhart and Elkhart County—my first visit to the Mennonite people of this locality and attended for the first time in my life the Mennonite Meeting at Yellow Creek. Remember this was in the fall of 1862.

It was a very remarkable meeting to me as well as to many others. I was then "that young fellow from Chicago." They didn't know my name so they distinguished me from all the other visitors here at that time but I did not know it until many years after.

I had intended to be present at that conference, but did not get here to Yellow Creek until the conference was over.

The conference was then held, if I remember right, on the second Friday in October. Saturday, the day following the conference, was the day for Baptismal Services and on this occasion 43 persons, mostly young men, were baptized. It was then yet in the early part of the Civil War and the young men were all subject to be drafted into the service. The government had passed a law that all "Conscientious Objectors" (as they were called in the late war), belonging to a church whose principles were opposed to warfare could pay a fine of \$300 in lieu of service and remain at home, and this was to some extent a reason that so many were baptized at that time and received into church membership. It was indeed a grand sight to see so many unite with the people of God and it gave me a very favorable and encouraging idea of the Mennonite Church in Indiana.

The day following was Sunday, and for the Yellow Creek Church Communion day. This drew together an immense crowd of people and over 600 brethren and sisters participated in the Communion and Feetwashing. I shall never forget that meeting and the few days we spent together here at this place and I rejoiced in my heart for these happy experiences of a living faith and religion.

Here I became acquainted with Bishop John M. Brenneman of Elida, Allen Co., Ohio. He was the Bishop that did most of the preaching and officiated in the baptismal services and the communion services.

I went back to my home in Chicago and attended to my work in the Lumber office during the week and my church and Sunday school services on Sunday. At that time I was a S. S. scholar in one Sunday school, a teacher in another, and superintendent in a third Sunday school. Besides attending to these three Sunday schools, I also attended each Sunday two church services, one in the forenoon and the other in the evening. Sunday in this way was for me a busy day, but was what I enjoyed.

One beautiful sun-shiny Sunday morning, the last Sunday in May 1863, I was told that there was someone at the door of my boarding house who asked to see me, and going to the door, I saw standing before me the old Mennonite Bishop John M. Brenneman. When I asked him to come into the house and make himself at home with us, he told me that he was in company with the aged minister, Peter Nissley, of Lancaster Co., Pa. They had been visiting some of the small Mennonite congregations in the west and among the congregations the one at Sterling, Ill., and after holding communion with them, they had started away on Saturday morning with the intention of getting to Elida, Ohio, to the home of Bro. Brenneman and Bro. Nissley was to be his guest over Sunday and would preach there. But when they came to Chicago, the Saturday trains had all left and there was no train to take them to Elida until late on Sunday afternoon. All they could do was to remain in Chicago over Sunday.



It was for them indeed a sad disappointment, but it has been a comfort to me and one of the happy events of my life that God had so ordered it as you will see in the events following.

I took pleasure in entertaining the brother, took him along to church service and brought him back with me for dinner. Brother Nissley had relatives or friends residing on Michigan Ave. with whom he had spent the night and after dinner he also came to see me. The two brethren were not pronounced friends of Sunday schools of which fact I was well aware and so I had to use prudence in taking them to a place which their church rules did not sanction. I told them this was a special day, the anniversary of the establishing of the school. I was the

superintendent and we had made special preparations for the service, and as the superintendent I had to be there and asked them kindly to go with me. Without any objection they at once consented to accompany me and I felt glad to have them. They never said a word to me against Sunday schools. They seemed rather pleased with the talk, the singing and the teaching, and a little later I had a letter from Bro. Nissley, which praised my work and bid me God's blessing on the work I was doing, which was a matter of great enjoyment to me.

(This address was copied, and slightly edited, from a notebook in the John F. Funk collection in the Mennonite Church Archives. The date and place of the address are not given.)

## Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Benevolent Organization of Mennonites

The B. O. of M. convened at 145 W. 18th St. Chicago, Illinois on the 26th of December 1894, with the President, Bro. M. S. Steiner, in the chair.

The session was opened with singing, followed by earnest prayers in behalf of the work before the Board.

After prayer it was *Resolved*, That rules be suspended and that the following persons, not members of the Board, be permitted to take part in the sessions as members: Dr. H. A. Mumaw, Elkhart, Indiana, Bish. J. M. Shenk, Elida, Ohio, Pre. Peter Unsicker, Cullom, Illinois, Bro. Hamilton, Cullom, Illinois, Bro. G. L. Bender, Elkhart, Indiana.

The President then gave a report and presented a number of suggestions, all of which were discussed separately. The Manager of the Mission, Bro. S. F. Coffman, and the Sec-Treas., Bro. E. J. Berkey, gave satisfactory reports of the condition and progress of the work. Both brethren suggested the advisability of having a regularly ordained minister and his wife to take charge of the work. The following resolutions were then adopted:

1 *Resolved*, That the B. O. of M. accept the request of the Home Mission Advisory Committee and assume the responsibility of looking after the interests of the Home Mission in Chicago.

2 *Resolved*, That this organization request Bro. C. B. Brenneman and wife of Elida, Allen Co., Ohio to come to the Home Mission at Chicago, Ill. sometime in the present winter to acquaint themselves with the work and that Bro. Brenneman hold a series of meetings during his stay.

Session then adjourned for recess.

### Afternoon Session

The reports given by the president, manager, and treasurer showed that the different departments of the work, such as Kindergarten, Sewing School etc. were about self-supporting, excepting the medical dispensary; it was therefore

3 *Resolved*, That the physicians in charge of the Dispensary be authorized to charge a fee of 25 cents from such patients as are able to pay for medical treatment received.

The matter of sending a mission worker to Dickson Co., Tenn was next discussed. There being a number of members there without a minister, and under no conference, it was therefore

4 *Resolved*, That the traveling expenses of Bro. A. J. Yoder be paid to Dickson Co., Tenn. and that he engage in such work for the interest of the cause as may be deemed advisable.

In view of the increase of the work and the extra expense during the winter it was therefore

5 *Resolved*, That the monthly allowance for the Home Mission be \$150 for the winter months and \$125 for the summer months, and that the brethren, W. B. Page and D. R. Good, having charge of the Dispensary, receive their board free at the Home.

Inasmuch as the question of establishing an Orphan's Home has been brought before several of our conferences, and whereas Bro. S. K. Plank of Orrville, Ohio has tendered such assistance as to make such an establishment feasible, therefore be it

6 *Resolved*, That the offer of Bro. S. K. Plank of Wayne Co., Ohio, to lease his farm and home on which he resides to the Benevolent Organization of Mennonites to be used as an Orphan's Home, be accepted on the condition that the lease be extended to five years or longer and that the matter be referred to the Ohio Conferences for approval.

The matter of education was taken under consideration. The necessity of a good education for the advancement of the cause of Christ in every age, and especially in this age of education, the dangers awaiting the student at many of the schools and colleges of our land, the example set us by such men as Moses,

Joseph, Daniel, Paul, Jerome, John Deuck, Hubmaier, Menno Simons and others were pointed out and discussed; also the disadvantages under which our people labor in having to place our young people under other denominational influences to obtain an education, and the advantages they would enjoy by being in the society of our own people while attending school. It was therefore

7 *Resolved*, That we recommend the Elkhart Institute to any who desire to obtain a practical education. It was further

8 *Resolved*, That the report of this meeting of the B. O. of M. together with the Constitution and By-Laws of the same be printed in pamphlet form for distribution.

9 *Resolved*, That the names and addresses of all the members of the B. O. of M. be published with the Constitution.

It was further suggested that any person or persons interested in Mission work communicate with the President or Secretary or other member of the B. O. of M.

In consideration of their donation made to the B. O. of M., the brethren Peter Unsicker, C. H. Brunk and J. S. Augspurger were received as members for five years.

The election of officers resulted as follows:

### Directors

For three years: J. S. Hartzler, A. R. Zook, A. B. Kolb

For two years: D. S. Yoder, J. K. Hartzler, G. L. Bender

For one year: M. S. Steiner, Chr. Herr Jr., D. Bergy

President: M. S. Steiner  
Vice President: J. S. Hartzler  
Secretary: A. B. Kolb  
Treasurer: A. R. Zook

After the election of officers the meeting was adjourned.

Secretary Pro tem  
A. B. Kolb

(The above minutes are deposited in the J. F. Funk Collection, Mennonite Church Archives, Goshen, Indiana.)

### Amish in North Dakota

The article appearing under the above title in the January 1953 BULLETIN was mistakenly credited to Floyd E. Kauffman. The writer of the article in its present form is not known, although Eli J. Bontreger, Shipshewana, Ind., wrote the original upon which this article is based. The last paragraph of the article should have stated that Eli J. Bontreger served as bishop of the congregation from 1901 to 1910, when he moved to Wisconsin, and after that assisted the church by visiting them twice a year until 1936. Jacob Graber was ordained minister of the congregation in 1907 and bishop in 1913. Abraham (Abe) R. Gingerich was ordained minister in 1910, bishop in 1922, and died in 1930. For additional information on the Amish in North Dakota, see Melvin P. Hochstetler, "The Amish and Mennonites of Pierce and Rolette Counties of North Dakota," *Gospel Herald*, Aug. 1, 22, 1950. —M. G.

